



News Release

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Summer pests can sting, bite, and spread disease — protect yourself

OLYMPIA — The arrival of warm summer weather means barbeques, outdoor activities, and increased encounters with bugs that may bite or sting. Keeping your cool when bugs fly can help reduce your risk of winding up on the business-end of a bloodthirsty mosquito or irritated wasp.

Bees sting, yet they play an important role in pollinating flowering plants, including many foods that we enjoy. Honey bees and bumble bees that are away from their hive or nest and looking for nectar or pollen will rarely sting, except when stepped on or deliberately provoked.

Wasps and yellow jackets are more easily provoked than bees and their stings can be painful, with redness, itching, and swelling that may last for several days. Wasps and yellow jackets hunt for food and build nests this time of year.

To keep from being stung by a bee or wasp, don't disturb their hive or nest. Don't swat at bees or wasps — this agitates them, making them more likely to sting. Avoid brightly colored clothes, open-toed shoes, and perfumes or scented lotions when outside. Keep food covered or behind screens when eating outdoors. Dispose of food properly, including decaying fruit in late summer.

If you're allergic to wasp and bee stings, carry identification that states your allergy and any medicine you're taking. Severe reactions can affect the whole body and may occur very quickly — often within minutes — and may be fatal if untreated. Call 9-1-1 if someone who was stung has chest pain, face or mouth swelling, trouble swallowing, trouble breathing, or goes into shock.

There's plenty of talk about mosquito season and [West Nile virus](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) (www.doh.wa.gov/wnv), yet other summertime nuisances like horse and deer flies can also deliver a painful, itchy bite. Scratching the bite may lead to infection. Horse and deer flies are active during the day and are

common around ponds, streams, and marshes. They're capable of transmitting tularemia, a bacterial disease. Cover exposed skin and use a repellent to keep these flies from biting.

Two types of ticks are found across the state — hard and soft ticks. They usually feed on animals, but they'll feed on people when they can. Hard ticks can transmit Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever, though both of these are very rare in Washington. These ticks live in wooded, brushy, or grassy areas. Hikers, campers, and others spending time outdoors in tick-infested areas should check themselves for ticks often.

Tick-borne relapsing fever is transmitted by soft ticks. It's the most common tick-borne disease in the state. Houses and cabins infested with rodents may also be home to soft ticks. If a tick bite results in a fever, rash, pain, or swelling, call your health care provider. [Tick removal tips are available online](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WATickDiseases.htm#remove) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WATickDiseases.htm#remove).

For bites and stings, remove the stinger by scraping the back of a credit card or other straight-edged object across the stinger. Don't use tweezers to remove stingers — these may squeeze the venom sac and increase the amount of venom released. Immediately remove nearby rings and items that constrict because the affected area may swell. Wash the site with soap and water. Put ice (wrapped in a washcloth) on the site for 10 minutes and then take it off for 10 minutes. Repeat this process. If necessary, take an antihistamine, or apply creams that reduce itching. Over the next few days, watch for signs of infection (increasing redness, swelling, or pain). If signs of infection appear, contact your health care provider.

More information on summer pests is on the Department of Health [zoonotic disease website](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/ZOO.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/ZOO.htm).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health website at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
